



Course Report 2019

Subject	Spanish
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

The number of candidates presented for Advanced Higher Spanish continues to increase. There were 19 new centres presenting this year.

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Candidates responded well to this question paper, especially when answering the comprehension questions (1–6). Most engaged with the subject matter of the text, which related to children being allowed in public places.

Generally, candidates responded more successfully than in previous years to the overall purpose question (question 7). However, the majority of candidates found some of the sense units in the translation (question 8) challenging.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

The listening section which focused on gender equality in the workplace, proved to be challenging for many candidates. They appear to have achieved slightly better results for item 2.

In the discursive writing section, there were some very good essays, which demonstrated flair, appropriate use of idiomatic language and accurate expression of opinions. However, occasionally, candidates only scored a maximum of 16 marks as a result of not addressing the question fully, and relying instead on reproducing learned material or a previously written essay.

It was pleasing to note that the four essay titles were attempted. The most popular choices being on young people's attitude towards the environment (question 3), and on companies no longer seeing the value of university degrees (question 5).

Portfolio

There was a good degree of variety in the way the portfolio was approached, with an encouraging improvement on last year's average score.

Performance–talking

As in previous years, candidates did very well in this skill area.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Overall, candidates responded very well to this question paper, especially in the comprehension questions (1–6). In particular, questions 1, 2(a), 2(c) and 4(a) were successfully attempted.

For question 7, the overall purpose question, those who did well made reference to the writer's stylistic features, how these substantiated his/her argument and what impact they made on the reader.

In the text for translation, candidates generally found sense units 1, 4 and 5 more accessible than the others.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening

Item 1: candidates coped well with question 1(a)(ii) and 1(d)(ii).

Item 2: questions 2(c), 2(f), 2(g) and 2(i) were successfully attempted.

Discursive Writing

The majority of essays were fairly well structured and written in paragraphs. Candidates generally achieved good results when they incorporated appropriate learned material into their response and their essays were relevant to the question.

Candidates achieved best results when they fully addressed the titles and produced essays containing coherent language and interesting ideas. Of the four choices available to them, question 3, on the environment, was the one attempted most successfully, closely followed by questions 5 and 6.

Appropriate linking structures and phrases relating to expressing opinions were characteristics of good practice: *si tuviera que dar mi opinión... sin lugar a dudas ... cabe agregar ... vale mencionar ... hay que destacar que ... que yo sepa ... me inclino a creer que ... mantengo que.*

In addition, well-structured essays contained phrases associated with linguistic signposting: *Hay quienes dicen ... Adicionalmente ... En primer lugar/en primera instancia ... Habiendo considerado todos los aspectos ... Al fin y al cabo.*

There was also some excellent use of structures, for example: *se puede constatar que ... hacer la vista gorda a ... la otra cara de la moneda ... para colmo de males ... una vida ajetreada ... en definitiva ... es esencial que examinemos/consideremos/en lo que se refiere a ... Con el fin de llegar a una conclusión definitiva/a modo de conclusión...*

Portfolio

Overall, the presentation of portfolio work was very good. The best essays were those which had a question and title which genuinely led candidates to adopt an analytical approach, or allowed for two sides of an argument to be developed. Essays often worked better when there was an element of comparing and contrasting, for example characters in novels, short stories, plays and/or films, or some analysis of poetry from an anthology, focusing on specific themes.

Candidates performed better than last year, coping well with providing evidence to highlight and back up their assertions. They used analytical and inferential-type language more often. There were some very mature approaches which candidates expressed well in clear and sufficiently sophisticated English.

Some of these included original studies on, for example, the role of Pepe el Romano in *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*, the character of Ángela in *Crónica de una Muerte Anunciada* or Ofelia's escapism in *Laberinto del Fauno*. Some very good essays focused on films such as *La Historia Oficial* and *Mar Adentro*. Although not attempted by many candidates, the study of writers like Antonio Machado and Pablo Neruda met with success as poetry tends to facilitate an immediate engagement with the text and generates the use of critical terminology.

The study of literary texts generally leads to better performances. However, results were encouraging where candidates provided details of cinematographic techniques in their analysis of films. There were no language in work-based portfolios this year.

More centres are seeing the benefit of attempting more unusual studies, for example *Primera Memoria*, *La Casa de los Espíritus*, *Cuentos de Eva Luna* and *Mar Adentro*. Some titles relating to these studies were enterprising and facilitated debate and evaluation.

Reliable bibliographies containing three or more references with at least two sources in Spanish, were a feature of good practice. It was pleasing to see that no candidate incurred a penalty for exceeding the word limit or failing to produce a bibliography.

Performance–talking

Most candidates were comfortable and confident in the language, with the majority scoring 30 marks or more out of 50 marks. In general terms, the choice of topics afforded candidates the ability to talk at length. Fluency and readily taking the initiative were features of good performances. Overall, candidates were enthusiastic and very well prepared. Many appeared motivated to do well and made good use of learned material. They were enterprising in their attempts to go beyond minimal responses and also incorporated some useful and interesting discussion techniques into their conversation with the visiting assessor, using the language at the required level of sophistication.

Contexts such as *la tecnología*, *los medios de comunicación*, *la inmigración*, *sociedades multiculturales*, *las nuevas familias* and *el medio ambiente* lent themselves to the use of more complex language structures than topics like *planes para el futuro*, *un año sabático/estudiando en el extranjero* and *las ventajas de aprender idiomas*. Discussion

related to the portfolio study was fairly well done. Candidates were very much at ease with the method of assessment.

Areas candidates found demanding

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Question 2(b): candidates had particular difficulty with interpreting the noun *los cristales*, giving incorrect answers such as 'crystal' or 'glasses' instead of 'windows'.

Question 4(b): some candidates had difficulty in expressing *cambiador para bebé* or mentioning the 'crayons/coloured pencils' with this to gain the mark.

Question 5: many candidates found the phrase *baja calidad dietética* difficult to render in an appropriate form of English. Candidates had problems with verbs like *contar con* and *quedar(se)*, while the noun *local* was often mistranslated as 'local' rather than 'place/establishment/restaurant'.

Question 7, the overall purpose question: candidates, in general, are still not providing a sufficiently reflective or evaluative response. As in previous years, those who performed less successfully tended to supply information from the text rather than engaging in analysis. Candidates tended to find it challenging to construct their answers with inferential-type language. They may make mention of stylistic features but many fail to explore the impact on the reader of, for example, the title of the text, the use of questions or forceful language, the structure of the text, the use of statistics or direct speech, and real-life examples.

Overall, many candidates wrote their responses without going beyond a recounting of the facts outlined in the text. In a number of cases, expression in English was poor and answers tended to lack structure and/or come to an abrupt end.

In the text for translation, many candidates had difficulty with the following expressions:

Sense unit 2: *todavía queda mucho camino por recorrer*, which was often clumsily, rather than idiomatically, expressed in English.

Sense unit 3: a number of candidates missed out the word 'us', and found it challenging to translate *igualarnos*.

Sense unit 7: *que tienen sus propias mesas* caused problems for some candidates, who failed to grasp that *que* meant 'who' in this case.

Sense unit 8: very few candidates correctly translated the idiomatic expression *nada más llegar*, and some chose not to translate it at all.

Sense unit 9: *no se trata de* presented issues, although candidates should be familiar with this expression at this level.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening: item 1

Question 1(a)(i): candidates had difficulty understanding *tardar alrededor de 100 años en alcanzarse*. Some failed to answer this.

Question 1(c): very few candidates scored any marks in this question, as they did not compare the situation of women in management posts in Spain with the situation worldwide.

Listening: item 2

Question 2(b): many candidates did not achieve a mark for failing to understand *prejuicios*.

Question 2(d): not all candidates grasped the idea of having to understand both *bomberos* and *pilotos* to gain the mark.

Question 2(e): many candidates failed to mention *prueba de aptitude*.

Question 2(h)(ii): most candidates gained only the first mark. Few candidates managed to state that the media provided the wrong or a false message, or that society had low expectations.

Discursive Writing

Some candidates ran into difficulties when going beyond prepared material and, on occasion, this led to them not fully addressing the question. These candidates were inclined to 'disguise' their essays (mostly unsuccessfully) to suit the title in the question paper, or write pre-prepared essays which clearly compromised relevance and focus. In addition, these memorised essays also led to candidates making more grammatical errors as they tended to omit several words, rather than creating an original piece of work by using their knowledge and ability to manipulate the language.

Question 3, *El problema más grave para el futuro del medio ambiente es la falta de interés por parte de los jóvenes*: some candidates chose to write about environmental problems and solutions without referring to the attitude of young people.

Question 4, *Las personas aprenden mejor cuando se les presenta un desafío*: proved difficult for many candidates, who found it difficult to provide a focus for their essay. Some wrote about the challenging aspects of life unrelated to learning which had a negative impact on their mark.

Question 5, *En el siglo veintiuno, a las empresas no les importan tanto los títulos universitarios*: some candidates simply wrote an essay on the benefits of going to university without addressing the issue of the attitude of companies and/or employers. This detracted from the mark they were awarded.

Question 6, *Leer libros o periódicos ya está pasado de moda*: occasionally generated an essay about technology with little reference to books or newspapers.

Some candidates have still not moved on from the personal response essay approach and struggled to sustain the complex and sophisticated language required for discursive writing.

Other reasons for lack of quality in discursive writing included:

- ◆ repeating the title in the essay, sometimes on several occasions
- ◆ errors in adjectival agreements
- ◆ random and inappropriate use of infinitives
- ◆ the inability to conjugate verbs or manipulate tenses
- ◆ incorrect use of gerund, for example in wrong place
- ◆ unidiomatic translation from English into Spanish, for example:
 - question 6: *los jóvenes actitud*
 - question 5: *buscando por*
 - question 3: *no son intereses en*
- ◆ the incorrect use of *ser* and *estar*
- ◆ the failure to incorporate the use of the subjunctive when necessary

Essays which were repetitive, rarely did better than a borderline pass. Those which did not fully address the question may have achieved less than this if it was felt that over half of the essay was irrelevant.

Portfolio

The selection of titles was more encouraging this year than in previous years. Despite this, many candidates still find it difficult to select a title or essay question which generates debate or critical analysis. Too many candidates had poorly worded titles or titles that were too vague, contrived, over-complicated or not framed as a question. There continues to be a fair number of obvious titles with predictable conclusions.

Media essays were inclined to be more informative and less investigative.

Some candidates used the first person in their essays, for example 'in my opinion' or 'I think that'. Essays of this type were usually lacking in detailed analysis. Where candidates took a more objective approach and used the third person, there tended to be better critical evaluation of the subject matter.

In some instances, candidates struggled to sustain the quality of writing, and expression of ideas throughout their essay. At times, there was too much information and not enough evaluation. Some candidates' use of critical terminology was limited.

Instead of selecting and analysing evidence before drawing conclusions, many candidates wrote their conclusion in the opening paragraph and then tried to justify this throughout the rest of the essay.

A significant number of candidates did not effectively proofread their portfolio in English, especially when quoting in Spanish from a literary text, or screenplay from a film.

Unfortunately, there are still too many candidates who choose to study Lorca, and associate the themes of his plays written in the early 1930s with the Franco regime which effectively began in 1939.

Some bibliographies were sparse and unsophisticated, for example Wikipedia, indicating a lack of research, and this generally had a negative impact on candidates' writing. Some candidates lost marks by failing to provide at least two sources in Spanish in their bibliography.

Performance—talking

Despite this being the skill area where candidates generally do well, some still have difficulty manipulating and adapting learned material in order to cope with questions they are asked.

Some candidates were not able to respond to questions on topics they had listed on their STL form. Others, who had chosen to discuss, for example, future plans, gap years and the importance of learning languages, found it challenging to consistently incorporate the use of complex and sophisticated language and to sustain the discussion.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Centres should:

- ◆ share all criteria, detailed marking instructions, pegged marks and performance descriptors with candidates
- ◆ incorporate Understanding Standards materials into lessons
- ◆ encourage candidates to make full use of SQA's website, especially the last two years course reports for Advanced Higher Spanish, and the marking instructions for Advanced Higher Spanish past papers
- ◆ remind candidates that handwriting needs to be clearly legible to ensure marks awarded match content

Question paper: Reading and Translation

- ◆ Candidates should divide time appropriately between the comprehension questions, the overall purpose question, and the translation.
- ◆ In general, candidates provide a good level of detail in their answers to the comprehension questions. It would be helpful to advise them to look closely at the number of marks awarded for each question, which will guide them towards the amount of information they are required to provide.
- ◆ A comprehensive answer is likely to be more rewarding, for example baby changing facilities and a tub of crayons were both required for 1 mark in question 4(b).
- ◆ Candidates should pay particular attention to their expression in English. Some had problems communicating the idea of contempt or scorn in question 1, and the lack of dietary and nutritional quality in children's meals in question 5.
- ◆ When using a dictionary, candidates should explore all meanings of the word they are looking up to ensure they choose the one which best fits the context of their answer. The word *local* presented difficulties for some candidates.

For question 7, the overall purpose question, centres should encourage candidates to draw inferences from the text and not to merely provide factual information or repeat the answers to their comprehension questions. Good responses to the question this year provided a good balance between identifying the writer's standpoint and the techniques he/she used to exemplify this.

Answers to the overall purpose question should be well structured and have a rounded conclusion. Any quotation from the text should be appropriate and relevant, not merely a repetition of what has been argued in English. It is important to note that if candidates are quoting in Spanish from the text, providing a word-for-word translation in English adds nothing to their argument.

A succinct answer using inferential-type language, for example 'the writer implies that...', 'suggests that...', 'highlights...', 'this leads me to believe that...', would be more likely to achieve a good mark than a long drawn-out response which simply provides information from the text, probably already covered in the answers to comprehension questions 1–6.

For the overall purpose question, candidates should consider:

- ◆ the title of the article
 - ◆ how the text begins and ends
 - ◆ the structure of the text
 - ◆ reference to any statistics
 - ◆ quotations from experts
 - ◆ the use of questions and/or rhetorical questions
 - ◆ lists of words
 - ◆ instances of emotive language, and then examine the impact of these techniques in relation to how the writer develops his/her argument, for example:
 - Is the writer optimistic, positive, in favour of what is discussed in the article?
 - Or is the writer pessimistic, negative, against the theme of the text?
- If it allows for a balance of arguments, candidates should incorporate this into the answer.

Centres should continue to share the overall purpose exemplars on SQA's website with candidates, and use these as a means of discussing and reviewing the best format and type of language required to answer this question successfully.

For question 8, the translation, more attention should be given to the development of translation skills and, in particular, ways of converting idiomatic expressions from Spanish into English. Candidates should take special care with recognising and accurately translating tenses.

Centres should ensure that all candidates have developed their skills in the use of a dictionary. Candidates should consider not just the first item they see, but all meanings of the word or phrase they are looking up to ensure they choose the one which best fits the context of their translation.

Centres should encourage all candidates to read and review their translation when they complete it to ensure it makes sense and reads well in English.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening

Centres should:

- ◆ encourage candidates to provide as full and detailed answers as possible
- ◆ continue to revise numbers with candidates
- ◆ suggest that candidates access listening materials on the internet, especially short news items on Spanish radio
- ◆ advise candidates on how they should best use the time at the start of the recording for looking at the questions
- ◆ discuss and practise with candidates strategies for note-taking while they are listening to the recording
- ◆ use the target language as much as possible in class to help develop listening skills

Discursive Writing

Centres should:

- ◆ continue to develop the candidates' grammatical accuracy they require at this level (see 'Areas candidates found demanding, Discursive Writing' section)
- ◆ ensure candidates address the question at all times and do not reproduce a well-rehearsed essay which may not be entirely relevant. Essays should address all aspects of the title
- ◆ remind candidates to remain within the word limit and have a focused approach
- ◆ encourage candidates to avoid high-frequency language
- ◆ encourage candidates to adopt a strategy to incorporate complex and sophisticated language appropriate to Advanced Higher, and to the subject matter of the essay
- ◆ encourage candidates to build up banks of phrases for use in their essays
- ◆ remind candidates that they should set aside some time during the examination to use their dictionary to proofread their essay
- ◆ should ensure candidates have, or are provided with, a dictionary of quality, appropriate to the demands of the discursive writing
- ◆ advise candidates to focus on structure and to reveal their conclusion at the end of their essay rather than in the first paragraph

Portfolio

The choice of a title is of crucial importance. The title should not be over-ambitious, vague or too general but should generate a discursive and/or evaluative approach. It may require a narrow focus to allow for deeper analysis.

Centres should:

- ◆ negotiate appropriate essay titles with candidates to ensure they adopt a consistently investigative tone throughout their work
- ◆ discuss the use of critical terminology with candidates to enable them to improve the quality of their expression in English
- ◆ address the choice of suitable and compatible sources, and avoid allowing candidates to access secondary sources which do not closely relate to the primary source
- ◆ remind candidates there should be a critical evaluation of the primary source
- ◆ ensure titles including 'To what extent..?' should not be predictable or unoriginal, but should generate a balanced approach, taking a range of arguments into account
- ◆ encourage candidates to check the factual accuracy of their work, ensuring they have a true understanding of, for example:
 - the literary technique of magical realism, and correct themselves of the idea that this is a theme
 - approaches which incorrectly compare the women in Lorca's plays to women living in Franco's Spain
- ◆ encourage candidates to carefully consider the introduction and conclusion of their essays, and avoid the study of texts, articles and/or films which are not intended for native speakers of Spanish

- ◆ encourage candidates to maintain an objective tone throughout and avoid anecdotal expressions, for example 'I personally believe...'
- ◆ advise candidates portfolio pieces would benefit from more quotations in Spanish to support the arguments being developed. Quotations from a literary text or film, or any other source, which are solely in English could detract from the content. It may even lead to the candidate being awarded 0 marks if it is felt they have not read, for example a literary text in Spanish
- ◆ encourage candidates to develop the quality and breadth of their bibliographies. Reference to Wikipedia often suggests a lack of breadth of research. Any inclusion of, for example, university notes provided by a teacher or lecturer does not constitute an appropriate item for a bibliography
- ◆ ensure candidates take more care and attention when proofreading the use of English for spelling, typing errors and punctuation, as well as accuracy in quotation from literary texts
- ◆ encourage candidates to avoid the use of inappropriate register and language. They should vary their expression throughout their essay and avoid the repetition of words and phrases
- ◆ make candidates aware the quality of English in the portfolio is of paramount importance and an appreciation of how to structure an essay is essential

Performance

Centres should:

- ◆ sustain the excellent work in preparing candidates for this component but perhaps with an increasing focus on grammatical accuracy, in particular with the use of:
 - verbs (especially the preterite and the perfect)
 - gender of nouns
 - adjectival agreements
 - *ser* and *estar/para* and *por* and the subjunctive
- ◆ encourage candidates to develop banks of phrases in relation to discussion techniques to deal with any question which goes beyond their 'comfort zone' of learned material

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	456
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Number of resulted entries in 2019	469
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	37.1%	37.1%	174	136
B	19.6%	56.7%	92	116
C	21.3%	78.0%	100	97
D	8.1%	86.1%	38	87
No award	13.9%	-	65	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The principal assessor and SQA qualifications manager meet with the relevant SQA head of service and statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.